

JSC hosts first annual Monica Lamb/NASA Science and Basketball Camp



Houston Comets' player Kim Perrot, center, signs autographs.

About 100 students from the Houston Independent School District attended their own launch March 18 at JSC. Yes, "their own launch." They built and launched their own rockets. The students participated in the first annual Monica Lamb/NASA Science and Basketball Camp at Texas Southern University, during spring break.

The camp was the vision of Monica Lamb, center for the two-time championship Women's National Basketball Association's Houston Comets. After hosting expensive basketball camps around the country, Lamb was saddened that many inner-city children right here in Houston might not ever be able to attend such a camp because their families cannot afford the cost. Being a native Houstonian and a product of the HISD, she was determined to make sure that some underprivileged students in Houston were afforded the opportunity to attend such a camp at no expense. She received moral support from the Houston Comets, but understood that she would have to endure the financial costs alone.

Lamb had previously met and worked with Marilyn Donald, JSC equal employ-

ment opportunity specialist, at other JSC-supported outreach programs designed to increase the number of minorities and females entering the science and engineering fields. Lamb contacted Donald to partner with JSC to make her vision a reality that the Comets, JSC and all of Houston could be a part of. Donald then contacted Space Center Houston and JSC employees Tamara Martin, Keith Combs, Gladys Henderson, Pat Lawson and other members of the Houston National Technical Association.

This began a Lamb/NASA partnership that would produce one of the most exciting, rewarding, athletic and educational camps ever held in Houston. Texas Southern University provided the facilities, JSC provided the classroom instructors and guest speakers, and Lamb provided the basketball lessons and other guests speakers, including Houston Comets' basketball player Kim Perrot. Gail Wittermore-Smith, Angela Vong and Shana Appel of Texas STAR-BASE, a national nonprofit educational organization, provided a one-day training course for JSC employees to teach them how to help the students build



Monica Lamb/NASA Science and Basketball Camp committee members, from left, front, are: Marilyn Donald, Tamyra Martin, Winston Scott, Gladys Henderson and Keith Combs; back: Monica Lamb and Johnny Pete.

their rockets and classroom support the day the students built their rockets. Space Center Houston provided in-kind support including a launch pad and two employees to assist in the rocket launching.

Donald told Lamb that education is the main goal when JSC participates in outreach programs. Therefore, the camp was designed to give the students a full week of extensive but fun hands-on science projects with an emphasis on teamwork and NASA-specific projects. Martin, Combs, Henderson, Lawson and other JSC engineers developed the entire curriculum for the camp and served as classroom instructors. Each day of the weeklong camp, the children completed one-half day of hands-on science projects and one-half day of basketball lessons. Classroom curriculum covered many topics including the solar system, the Extravehicular Activity spacesuit, the effects of microgravity and rocket building.

"I put my heart and soul into this project because so many inner-city children are not exposed early enough to how math and science can benefit everyone," said Martin. "The kids are afraid of math and

science because their parents were, and I felt that it was my duty to share with them that math and science can be fun and rewarding to them as individuals and to society as a whole."

According to Combs, "Inner-city school students are not exposed to what NASA is really about or are unaware that there are unlimited career opportunities available here if they choose to pursue them. The students just might be interested in and quite capable of making a significant contribution to NASA's missions in the new millennium if we mentor them at an early age. The Monica

Lamb/NASA Science and Basketball Camp afforded us an opportunity to do that."

Then came the grand finale. For the major hands-on science project, the students built mock rockets and launched them, 100 to 200 feet in the air, at an open field near Rocket Park. Astronauts Yvonne Cagle, Winston Scott and Joan Higginbotham assisted the students during the rocket launch to provide encouragement and serve as role models for the children. The energy, enthusiasm and intelligence the students displayed was overwhelming. ■



Russell Cowen of Space Center Houston helps the students place their rockets on the launch pad.